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**INSIDE WASHINGTON**

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# Reports persist on Castro illness

THE administration believes Cuban President Fidel Castro is seriously ill and may be preparing to transfer power soon to his brother, Raoul.

Rumors that Castro soon may die have been circulating in Latin America and Cuban-exile communities in the U.S. for several months.

And while administration officials state that the rumors appear to be premature, insiders say President Reagan's top foreign policy advisers firmly believe Castro suffers from a respiratory disease — possibly lung cancer.

"He appears to have lost his energy — his pizzazz," says one top Cuba watcher.

"Here's a guy who used to give speeches that lasted for four hours at a time. Now he can barely get through remarks that

last only 20 minutes."

Meanwhile, the State Dept. and the U.S. intelligence community have been watching closely a series of Gorbachev-style government purges ordered by Castro in recent months for clues as to what the U.S. can expect in a post-Castro Cuba.

The preliminary conclusion: Castro's designated successor Raoul is a weaker personality than Fidel and thus is likely to be more willing to do the Kremlin's bidding.

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REAGAN is planning to turn up the heat on Castro and his Nicaraguan allies this week during his dramatic and highly symbolic visit to Grenada.

White House Officials say the President will use Thursday's trip to the Caribbean island liberated from Communists in 1983 to announce plans to resume military aid to anti-Sandinista rebels in Nicaragua.

The officials say that Reagan's message, using thousands of cheering islanders as a backdrop, will be lost on no one.

The Grenada trip is part of an aggressive new strategy by Reagan to press for approval of his two most controversial programs: aid to the freedom fighters

and his \$311.6 billion defense budget.

The President also is scheduled to go on national television with his request to increase defense spending by 8.2 per cent this year.

This is a sign that he has no intention of bargaining away defense dollars with Congress in the early stages of this year's budget showdown.

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